

## MYTH

Patients consulting for upper respiratory tract infection (URTI) always want an antibiotic<sup>1,2</sup>

## FACT

Most patients seek information on the cause, prognosis and duration of symptoms, and pain relief<sup>1,2</sup>

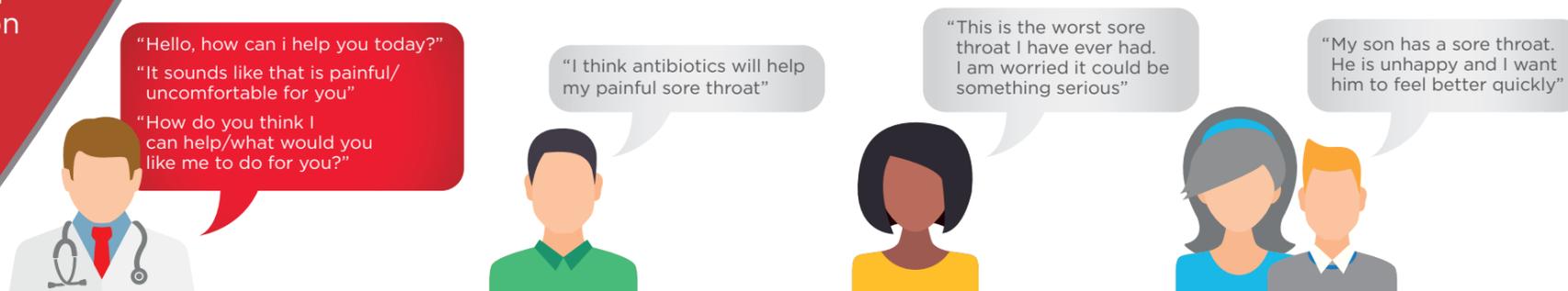
# Use the 1,2,3 APPROACH

when talking to patients about URTI – the example here is for sore throat

### 1

## ADDRESS PATIENT'S CONCERNS

- Ask the patient about their main symptom(s) and what they are concerned about
- Recognise that URTIs can be worrying and uncomfortable for patients



### 2

## BE VIGILANT - ASSESS SEVERITY

The majority of respiratory tract infections, including sore throats, are caused by viruses.<sup>3-8</sup> They are usually non-serious and self-limiting<sup>5,7</sup> and resolve without antibiotics in 1-2 weeks.<sup>9-14</sup>

However, patients at high risk of complications, presenting with red flag symptoms, or who appear very unwell, should be seen by a doctor and may require antibiotics. Symptoms that persist without improvement, or appear to be getting progressively worse may also require a doctor.



## RED FLAGS?

ANY OF THESE RED FLAG SYMPTOMS REQUIRE FURTHER INVESTIGATION:

- Coughing up blood<sup>15</sup>
- Shortness of breath, wheezing sounds, respiratory distress<sup>15,16</sup>
- Great difficulty swallowing, e.g. unable to swallow food<sup>15</sup>
- Drooling or muffled voice<sup>16</sup>
- Neck swelling<sup>16</sup> on one side of the neck, not related to the lymph nodes<sup>17</sup>
- Very high temperature (>39°C) or night sweats<sup>17</sup>



## HIGH RISK?

BE ALERT TO THOSE PATIENTS AT INCREASED RISK OF COMPLICATIONS:<sup>9</sup>

- Elderly patients aged >65 years or young children <2 years or born prematurely<sup>9,18</sup>
- Immunocompromised patients<sup>18</sup>
- Patients with pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, cystic fibrosis, chronic lung disease, HIV<sup>9,18</sup>

### 3

## COUNSEL ON EFFECTIVE SELF-MANAGEMENT

- Reassure the patient of the non-serious nature of most URTIs and the likely duration of symptoms
- Explain why antibiotics are not necessary – use the information overleaf
- Recommend symptomatic relief, allowing for personal preferences
- Advise the patient to seek further medical advice if symptoms last longer than expected, do not improve, or if they develop new symptoms

“From what you have said/your medical history/the physical examination, I think you have got a sore throat caused by a viral URTI. The symptoms are caused by your immune system fighting the infection.  
As you're otherwise healthy your immune system should be strong enough to tackle it, so we just need to help you get relief for your symptoms”

“Looking at your throat I can see it is quite inflamed but there are no signs of serious infection. You probably have a virus that should clear within 1 week or so. I am going to recommend an anti-inflammatory. These are available in a number of forms, and I will help you choose the right tablet, spray or lozenge, which meets your individual preferences and helps with the pain and discomfort. Antibiotics don't have direct pain-relieving action. They won't help you this time. Please come back to see me if your symptoms do not improve”

“I can see your throat does look painful. As you are healthy, this infection is not something to worry about. I am not going to prescribe antibiotics today as they won't help you this time. Antibiotics don't have any direct pain-relieving activity and they can have side effects. There is a risk they may not work for you in the future. The good news is that we can give you the relief you need now. Let's look at what symptoms are affecting you most and how I can help. Come back to me if your symptoms persist or do not improve”

“Your son does indeed seem unhappy. The good news is I've examined him and he has no signs of serious infection. I recommend we focus on solutions that will best relieve his symptoms and make him more comfortable. So I am starting with a course of pain relievers for children. Of course, if he is not better within 1 week – or if the symptoms do not improve – book an immediate appointment with me”

#### REFERENCES

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